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The Little Mexican Girl that Could: An Immigrant Child Becoming a Bilingual Teacher

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Introduction

The face of America is changing. There are currently more than 55 million Latinos living in the United States, many of whom are Spanish-speaking, making the United States the second-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world (Fernández Vitores, 2015). Nowhere, perhaps, are these shifting demographics more apparent than in our nation's public schools, where for the first time in U.S. history the majority of students are non-White (Maxwell, 2014). Increases in the Hispanic residential population have largely contributed to this shift, and in states with historically large percentages of Hispanic residents, like Texas, Hispanic children make up the largest percentage of students enrolled in public schools (TEA, 2014). However, while student demographics have shifted, those of teachers have remained largely the same as the majority of U.S. public school teachers remain White women from middle class, monolingual backgrounds (Nieto & Bode, 2011).

This situation has created a challenge as school districts and colleges of education struggle to meet an increasing need for certified teachers who can effectively provide English as a second language (ESL) instruction and bilingual instruction and services to growing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Research suggests that teachers who share cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences with their students may be better prepared to meet the needs of these learners effectively; however, such candidates are comparatively difficult to recruit into the profession (Ingersoll, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Therefore, there is a need to understand the experiences of those candidates who do successfully enter and remain in the profession. This article shares the findings from a continuing study of the experiences of Spanish bilingual teachers by focusing on one young woman's stories; its purpose is to illuminate potential obstacles and supports faced by children raised in linguistically and culturally diverse families in the United States who wish to become Spanish bilingual teachers. The findings hold implications for the practices and policies of PK–12 and higher educational institutions, and in addition reflect ongoing issues related to the recruitment, preparation, and retention of strong Spanish bilingual teachers.

Perspectives

Recent figures from the National Center for Education Statistics reveal that America's public schools are undergoing a historic transition, and that children considered non-White or Hispanic now constitute the collective majority of students enrolled in public schools (NCES, 2013). This shift is driven largely by an increase in the Latino population. Indeed, in states, such as Texas, that have historically high numbers of Latino residents, this

shift has already occurred. According to the Texas Education Agency (2014), Hispanics, comprising 51% of students, account for the largest percentage of the total enrollment in Texas public schools (TEA, 2014). Similarly, the Houston Independent School District, the nation's seventh-largest public school district and the largest in Texas, reports that Hispanic students comprise 62.1% of its total enrollment (HISD, 2015).

These demographic trends in the ethnicity of U.S. students are reflected in similar shifts in the number of students who are designated English language learners (ELLs) and who receive bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) instructional services. More than 5 million U.S. students are considered ELLs, with the vast majority (85%) being Spanish speakers (Camera, 2015). California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona have the highest percentages of Spanish speakers. In Texas, close to 1 million students (949,074) are considered ELLs, representing nearly one-fifth (18%) of all students enrolled in public schools (TEA, 2014). Nearly all of these students receive bilingual or ESL services (533,600 and 397,776, respectively), and the overwhelming majority, 90% (852,555), are Spanish-speaking (TEA, 2014). In HISD, these percentages are even higher, with almost one-third (64,349) of all students designated as having limited English proficiency (LEP, a classification analogous to ELL), with most receiving bilingual or ESL services (42,549 and 17,451 respectively) (HISD, 2015).

However, in contrast to the shifting demographics of U.S. students, those of teachers remain largely unchanged from previous decades. The vast majority of teachers continue to be White women from middle class and monolingual backgrounds (Nieto & Bode, 2011). Recent statistics reflect that in the 2011–2012 academic year, more than 4 of every 5 (82%) of the nation's 3.4 million public school teachers were non-Hispanic White, a percentage that had remained virtually unchanged from nearly a decade earlier (83% in 2003–2004) (NCES, 2013). In Texas and the Houston Independent School District, the percentages are somewhat more reflective of Hispanic student majorities, with approximately one-fourth of teachers identifying as Hispanic at both levels (25.16% and 27.1% respectively); however, these percentages still lag far behind student demographics (TEA, 2014; HISD, 2015). Isolated, the meaning and relevance of these figures may be unclear. Certainly they may hint at broader national and local demographic shifts, but they convey less regarding implications for education in our state and across our nation. However, when they are coupled with figures representing academic achievement, graduation, and discipline rates, all of which indicate that students considered non-White or Hispanic of color achieve at lower rates than their White peers but are

disciplined more frequently, a startling picture of our educational system begins to emerge (Nieto & Bode, 2011). The reality of shifting demographics presents an urgent need for recruiting, preparing, and retaining strong teachers of diverse students.

The crucial role of teachers in student success has been emphasized at all levels of educational discourse (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). Growing research and literature suggest that multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching provide approaches to teaching and learning that support diversity and equity while also using education as a basis for transformative social change (Banks & McGee Banks, 2009; Gay, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2011; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). These approaches emphasize the necessity of recognizing and valuing students' diverse backgrounds, identities, experiences, and interests. They view cultural knowledge and experiences as assets that can be used as resources to promote student achievement rather than as deficits to be overcome, and they assert that all students can be successful without their cultural integrity being impugned (Ladson-Billings, 1999). These approaches attend to the skills, information, cultural values and norms, or funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) that students bring into classrooms and connect with their homes, communities, and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Banks (2009) asserted that educators must validate the identities of students from diverse groups through teaching that must speak to and address experiences, personal identities, hopes, struggles, dreams, and possibilities. In other words, for students to internalize the concept, they must have experiences in the school, as well as in the larger society, that validate them as human beings; affirm their ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic identities; and empower them as citizens in the school and in the larger society (p.101).

Gay (2010) observed that "ethnicity and culture are *foundational anchors* of all other behaviors," and that "members of ethnic groups, whether consciously or not, share some core cultural characteristics" (p. 10). With a recognition of the connections among background, experience, and pedagogical practices, there is widespread support for recruiting, preparing, and retaining more diverse teachers who can effectively translate their own knowledge and experiences into responsive practices that meet the needs of all learners (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Gay, 2010). This need is especially apparent with regard to providing strong Spanish bilingual and ESL teachers. Highly qualified and certified bilingual and ESL teachers remain in short supply relative to the ever-increasing demand for professionals who can provide these services to the meet needs of current student populations in the United States and Texas. The U.S. Department

of Education has designated either or both bilingual and ESL as “teacher shortage areas” since the 1990–1991 academic year, as far back as this documentation extends. The result of this ongoing shortage is that “almost one in three new teachers assigned to work in bilingual and ESL classes are not certified to teach in that area, [demonstrating] continuing ... need for specialized staff development for those personnel” (Cortez, 2004). The purpose of this article is to share findings that provide insight into these issues in ways that can support the future development of strong Spanish bilingual teachers.

Context of the Inquiry

This article reveals findings from a longitudinal study of the experiences of Spanish bilingual teachers during their teacher preparation and early years of teaching. It concentrates on the experiences of one participant, Marlene (a pseudonym), focusing on stories that provide insight into the challenges and supports she encountered on her journey to becoming a Spanish bilingual elementary teacher. By narratively inquiring (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) into Marlene’s experiences before, during, and after she became a teacher, this study considered how teacher candidates develop during their process of becoming teachers. Adopting narrative understandings of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), the authors explored the relationship between Marlene’s personal and professional identities through the stories she told about her experience of becoming a teacher. These stories were captured through a series of interviews conducted as Marlene progressed through her teacher education courses at university, completed her student teaching, and transitioned into her initial induction year of teaching. Approaches to analyzing the field texts that resulted from these interviews included broadening and burrowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), restorying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and debriefing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Throughout the inquiry process, interim and research texts were shared with Marlene to ensure her participation in co-constructing meaning from these texts. This encouraged dialogue and reflection related to her experiences and perspectives that promoted resonance (Conle, 1996, 1997) with the representations made in the final research text. Although the inquiry is ongoing, the findings presented in this article center particularly on Marlene’s process of becoming a teacher in order to reveal the importance of her personal experiences in shaping her emerging professional identity as a teacher. Specifically, the stories shared illuminate how, throughout this process, Marlene continually storied and restoried her own experiences in ways that enabled her to make new meaning from them, thereby transforming

challenges to her personal identity into sources of support for her emerging professional identity.

Marlene, an only child, immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her parents when she was 7 years old. Her parents were both lawyers in Mexico, but after arriving in the United States, they entered retail service positions, and the family experienced economic hardship. Although Marlene's story is unique, in this way it has similarities to those of many other children of immigrant families that experience a decline in socioeconomic status after arriving in the United States (Ovando & Combs, 2012). As a result of immigrating at a young age, Marlene had most of her schooling in the United States, initially receiving ESL services and later mainstreamed into monolingual English classes. Again, this is reflective of the experiences of many linguistically diverse students educated under subtractive approaches to language acquisition and bilingual education (Valenzuela, 1999; Garcia, 2009). She attended schools in one of the largest districts in Texas, where she later returned as a student teacher and eventually began her teaching career, and where she is now the colleague of one of her own former elementary teachers.

Findings

In many ways, Marlene is an ideal Spanish bilingual teacher candidate. Marlene's experiences of becoming a teacher provide valuable insights into the obstacles and supports related to personal and professional identity that are encountered by committed and well-prepared candidates. Having arrived in the United States from Mexico at the age of 7 years, she pursued her cherished dream of becoming a teacher. She was drawn to the profession from a very early age, as she explains: *"When I was little I didn't play with Barbies, I 'taught' my Barbies ... that's how much I wanted to be a teacher ... since I remember, I've always wanted to be a teacher."* Her commitment to becoming a teacher persisted through high school and college, leading her to become president of the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE) and to participate in organizations like the Bilingual Education Student Organization (BESO). As she neared graduation from college and her teacher education program, she had passed all of the state-mandated certification exams to become a Spanish bilingual teacher on her first attempt. This position requires more certification exams than any other teaching position in Texas, including the demanding Spanish Texas Bilingual Target Language Proficiency Test (BTLPT). However, despite these strengths, Marlene faced many obstacles on her journey to becoming a teacher, which prompted Marlene to reposition herself in relation to society, her family, her own school experiences, and her profession.

Self and Society: “If we don’t teach children to pursue education ... we don’t have trained people who could represent us.”

Marlene’s experiences of becoming a teacher encouraged her to reflect on her own position and responsibility to her community. One of the obstacles in the recruitment of Latino children into teaching is what Marlene initially identified as a lack of college and professional career expectations for Hispanics:

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| <i>Mucha gente no valora la educación, graduarse de high school y ya puedes ir a trabajar. No valoran una educación más alta ... si no enseñamos a los niños que sigan su educación (porque sus padres no le enseñan) no tenemos gente capacitada que nos puedan representar en puestos de administración y liderazgo, managers en los restaurantes, en los hospitales, políticos.</i> | Many people don’t value education. [You] graduate from high school and then you can already go to work. They don’t value a higher education ... if we don’t teach children to pursue education, because their parents don’t teach them, we don’t have trained people who could represent us in leadership posts, managers in restaurants and in hospitals, politicians.) |
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In Marlene’s conversation, it is noticeable how she uses the pronoun *they* to refer to the broader Latino community, as if to imply a separate and distinct group of people, responsible for instilling the value of education in children. She then switches to using the pronoun *we*, reflecting her sense of belonging to the community of future Latino teachers whom she is addressing and her assumed responsibility in teaching children to pursue the type of education that would result in “*trained people who could represent us.*” Marlene suggests that the lack of professional leadership among the Latino community results in the devaluing of education needed to produce the future leaders necessary for strengthening the community. Marlene further elaborated on this idea in a subsequent interview by explaining how positioning herself to become such a professional leader, a teacher, was linked to her English proficiency. Evaluation of her first lesson as a student teacher prompted her to reflect,

I think that I still feel like the little Mexican girl that showed up without knowing English ... nobody knows that, but I know that, I don’t want them to think, “Oh, this girl doesn’t know how to do this.” ... Most people can’t tell, when I tell them I’m from

Mexico. They say, "You don't have an accent"; I say, "Yes I do. I can feel it." I just don't want them to know ... I feel that they are going to say, "Oh, you are not good enough, you're just like ..." I just feel like the little Mexican girl that came here without speaking English and so I don't want them to see that. That's like ... the part of me that doesn't have any confidence, and I don't want them to see that part. I don't know ... it's hard to explain ... maybe other immigrant students [have the same feeling]. I don't know, some of us have more to prove than others. I hate that this gets to me.

Marlene equates the challenges encountered on her journey to becoming a teacher to the "proof" she has to provide every time she is evaluated on her knowledge and choices. She is aware that her native-sounding English pronunciation is both a way she proves she is no longer that little Mexican girl who does not know English and a way to avoid being considered inferior for not knowing English. She asserts that it is crucial to hide that most vulnerable part of her that knows what it is like to lack confidence when being evaluated. Learning such proficient English was one of many obstacles Marlene faced on her journey to becoming a teacher. However, it is precisely the proficient Spanish she can hide at will that serves as a resource qualifying her as an ideal bilingual teacher candidate among students born and raised in the United States, who have often virtually lost their heritage language.

Self and Family: "I am trying to prove to them that I can be better than all of that."

Marlene's experiences also prompted her to consider her position within her own family. Marlene, after declaring, "*some of us have more to prove than others*," continues to unpack a more complex obstacle nested in her extended family. She explains how the recurrent burden of feeling "not good enough" was not just a memory to overcome or hide, it was a persistent devaluing message she had to endure in her community:

*My relationship with my dad's family is really not good. I can honestly say as horrible as it sounds that my grandparents don't like me.... They have a lot of grandchildren [and] I was always the one sticking out. They were all here and I was in Mexico. I came in and I feel like ... you know how it is when you patch something? In Mexico we put patches on pants, when you put a patch on something it is **on there** but it is on*

*after everything else; it could be easily removed or replaced. I was always the patch ... I never felt that I was part. I came into the family and the family was already formed. They were already a structure. They had their things going on and I came in as an addition. [Marlene uses her closed fist to represent the family and her palm to show herself as the patch trying to fit on top of it.] I felt that I wasn't really well accepted. And now ... of all my cousins, I'm the only one in my family that is going to graduate in four years, and the second one to ever graduate from college ... but even then it's not good enough for them. My cousins are the type of people that they like to party and go out and drink, and I don't do that so my grandma says I'm bitter and I'm just no fun. They don't get drunk, they just like to relax and have fun. I'm trying to do schoolwork, and "I'm bitter" because I'm trying to do schoolwork. They are always kind of putting me down. Nothing I do is good enough! Nothing I do is good enough! Ever! I could be president and they still are going to think it's not good enough! It's this type of people that you can't please and as much as I hate it I feel that that's also part of me. I'm not just trying to prove myself **here** but I am trying to prove to **them** that I can be better than all of that, that **I am** going to be better than all of that. It's a big load to carry sometimes. [Emphasis in inflexion is bolded.]*

The drinking, the partying, the not being "from here," her grandmother's accusations of Marlene being "bitter" and her disapproval of her granddaughter choosing to do schoolwork are how Marlene conceptualizes "all of that" she wants to get away from. Choosing to do schoolwork causes Marlene to be excluded by her extended family. She feels that the consequences of becoming a teacher are viewed as contesting what seem to be family cultural norms of not needing to pursue anything beyond finishing high school and getting a job. Marlene's determination to "be better than all of that" is a challenge to expectations deeply rooted not only in Latino families like hers, but also in society.

Self and School: "I'm not dumb, I know what I'm doing."

These persistent messages of not being good enough, rooted in a deficiency framework for how to think about the Latino experience, are obstacles hindering candidates like Marlene from choosing and entering the teaching profession. As part of her journey, Marlene had to confront these ideologies and reconcile her professional identity with her past experiences

as a linguistically diverse child schooled in a monolingual English context. Marlene's stories resonate with those of other bilingual Latino candidates the authors have encountered who offer their reasons for pursuing teacher careers based on the potential of providing a different and better quality of education than the one they experienced themselves. Marlene repeatedly and consciously drew upon her traumatic experiences as a newcomer to explain the sources of both obstacles to and supports for becoming a teacher. After receiving negative feedback from her university supervisor during an evaluation of the way she had taught a lesson, Marlene recalled,

When I was in third grade, the first teacher I had [after] I had just come here ... was really mean to me because she thought I was faking not knowing English ... she thought I was just being lazy ... she called me lazy so many times! ... I would cry every day because I did not know how to tell her, "I'm not lazy, I just don't know, I don't know right now." She never called on me, and I knew the answer. And when she called on me and I would answer her in Spanish, she would get so mad! She would stop everything and she would just scream at me for the whole time ... she would be like "say it in English." [I thought] "I don't know how to say it in English." Eventually, she just stopped calling on me ... It wasn't that I was dumb, I just didn't speak English ... I knew what was going on.... I guess I'm still trying to get that chip off my shoulder. I'm not dumb, I know what I'm doing.... It's like I'm trying to prove to her or something, you know? ... Now after having learned everything I've learned here [teacher preparation program] I just think about it and I ... how can she even treat me like that? It was so unfair.

Marlene offers a poignant picture of what non-English-speaking students often endure upon entering the U.S. educational system. Recent accounts from current candidate teachers in the authors' courses continue to emphasize the persistence of these humiliating practices. After they have encountered multiple messages that define their language and culture as deficient, the recruitment of Latino children into the teaching profession, or any other profession, is hindered from the outset by the current subtractive educational practices and policies toward linguistically diverse students.

Marlene, in many ways an ideal Spanish bilingual teaching candidate, although she was determined to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher, continually faced diminishing messages of "not being good

enough.” These experiences, encountered in societal, familial, and school contexts, challenge the reconciliation of her personal and professional identities. At the societal level, she is concerned that the Hispanic community does not value the levels of education and professionalism needed to generate future leaders that could represent and strengthen the Latino community. In the context of her extended family, she confronts exclusion when choosing to pursue a higher education degree instead of transitioning from high school directly into the workforce. In her schooling experiences, Marlene recalls not being good enough because she did not know English. Marlene’s story begins with her preoccupation regarding the lack of leaders that could represent her as a Latina and her call to educate parents and the Latino community to value higher education for their children. She then explains how proficiency in English is seen as characteristic of success, but she later also reveals the hardships behind the acquisition process that she endured in the school system and the challenge of continually having to confront messages of inferiority related to language and culture. One could conclude that “knowing English,” a unidimensional priority frequently imposed on linguistically diverse students, is insufficient to meet these challenges. It is understandable that Marlene sees these challenges as *“a big load to carry sometimes.”*

Self and the Profession: “Look! Yes I can, and yes I am being able.”

Marlene recalls how, after graduating and being hired as a bilingual teacher, she again confronted challenges to her emerging identity as a teacher during the process of being interviewed for teaching positions. Marlene uses both English and Spanish in her recollections:

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| <p><i>A mi me dijeron las personas que me entrevistaron en mi cara [sic], “Tu suenas muy Buena para ser verdad. You are too good to be true. You sound too good. You must have been rehearsed.” So que alguien te diga, “¿Sí suenas muy bien pero no te lo creo?!” Yeah, I sound really good because I really am. Because I give everything. Because I work [really hard], because this is what I wanted since I remember. ...So yes, I’m that good. Para mi</i></p> | <p>The people who interviewed me told me to my face, “You are too good to be true. You sound too good. You must have been rehearsed.” So, to have someone tell you, “Yes, you sound really well, but I don’t believe you?!” Yeah, I sound really good because I really am. Because I give everything. Because I work [really hard], because this is what I wanted since I remember. ... So yes, I’m that</p> |
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teaching no es algo que a lo mejor, este año y el año que entra a lo mejor me muevo ... yo sé que teaching va a ser toda mi vida. ... Estoy segura. ... Yo siempre he sentido que yo soy una niñita mejicana que llegué y aprendí inglés, y que mi vida desde ahí ha subido un poquito y ya. Pero yo siempre he sentido como que tengo algo que demostrarle a alguien: Mira, sí puedo, sí pude y sí estoy pudiendo. El problema está en que ahora, yo sentía que la persona [que no me dio el trabajo] me estaba diciendo, no you're not going to know. Y yo había dado todo. Yo había hecho todo lo que había podido hacer, me había preparado todo lo que podía, hice todo absolutamente lo mejor que pude y me dijeron que no era suficiente y eso fue el problema, que yo sabía en mi conciencia que eso era lo mejor ... más de mi no podían sacar. Era todo, no había más ... Y me dijeron que "no."

good. For me, teaching is not something that maybe I do this year and I move on to [something else] next year ... I know I will be teaching all my life. ... I am sure. ... I have always felt that I am a young Mexican girl who arrived and learned English, and that my life has improved a little bit and that's all. But I have always felt that I have something to prove to someone: Look, yes I can, yes I was able to, and yes I am being able. The problem is that now, I felt that the person [who was not giving me the job], was telling me, no you're not going to know. And I had given everything. I had done all I was able to do. I had prepared all I was able to. I had done absolutely the best I could and they told me that it was not enough and that was the problem. In my conscience I knew that was my best ... they could not have taken anything else from me. It was all, there was nothing left, and they told me "no."

The little Mexican girl was asked once more to explain the pain she had felt after "giving it all" and being rejected as a candidate for that first job. Marlene explained that the problem was not the possibility of her not becoming a teacher, since she had multiple other job offers besides the one that she had interviewed for at the school where she had done her student teaching, but that her identity as a teacher was judged as not being good enough. In the midst of this blow to her identity emerges her affirmation of who she is: "Yeah, I sound really good because I really am. Because I give everything." Marlene made sense of her experience of being rejected for that position by

rationalizing that the principal of the school didn't like people who could not be controlled. According to her story, those close to her would reassure her that the rejection did not have anything to do with her teaching ability, but with her being a principled teacher. As her fiancé would say of her, "*Ella no se deja*," which could be translated as "she doesn't let people boss her around." As she recalled,

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| <p><i>... toda la gente con la que hablado y la que me conocen me han dicho [es que] a ti no te puede controlar. Si tú sabes que eso es algo malo para tus niños por más que [la directora] te diga, tú no lo vas a hacer.... Si tu corazón te dice que esto es bueno para tus niños, [y] te dice que no lo hagas, no le vas a hacer caso, y a ella no le gusta la gente así. Y en verdad así soy.</i></p> | <p>... all the people that I spoke with who know me have told me ... they cannot control you. If you know that it is something wrong for your children, even if the principal tells you, you are not going to do it.... If your heart tells you that something is good for your children, and she tells you not to do it, you are not going to mind her, and she doesn't like people like that. And the truth is that I am like that.</p> |
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Despite having faced repeatedly what she feared the most—being told by her university supervisor and by a principal that her teaching was not good enough—Marlene remained committed to pursuing her goal of becoming a bilingual teacher. Reconstituting her confidence as a prepared, knowledgeable teacher, Marlene was even able to negotiate her first position on her own terms, choosing the school she liked and a lower grade that she preferred, although she was initially offered an upper grade. In this process, Marlene found in her reconstituted self and teacher identity the respect she had wanted from her third-grade teacher when she was that little Mexican girl who did not know any English, the respect that she did not get from her grandmother when she chose to become a teacher, the respect that would have explicitly valued her Spanish language as something to be cherished by her university supervisor, the respect that she obtained from classmates and teacher colleagues. Marlene was finding her place “to fit in” as the teacher she always wanted to be.

Conclusion: Self-Reconciled—“I am good enough, and now I understand that.”

Marlene's stories reflect the obstacles and supports she encountered during her journey to become a Spanish bilingual teacher, as well as how these experiences shaped her emerging identity as a teacher. Marlene simultaneously expresses confidence about her chosen teaching profession and confronts challenges to that confidence and identity rooted in experiences of inferiority—challenges that resonate with her from her memories of her grandmother, third-grade teacher, university supervisor, and a school principal. Why is the image of the little Mexican girl so recurrent in Marlene's stories? It is precisely that little Mexican girl, once an obstacle to be overcome, who has provided her with the support she can use to connect with students as a teacher by regarding their linguistic and cultural diversity as resources rather than as deficits.

Marlene knows what it is like to be called “dumb” for not knowing the language of instruction and “bitter” for wanting to study. In a more recent interview, Marlene, in her second year as a teacher, concluded, “*Yo soy lo suficientemente buena, y ahora entiendo eso,*” or “I’m good enough, and now I understand that.” Her words provide the sense of a reconciled self, of knowing who she is: a teacher who is good enough. She shared,

Porque esto es ... lo mío. So, ella [la directora que no me tomó] no me va a decir que yo no se hacer mi trabajo o que yo no soy lo suficientemente buena. No. Yo soy lo suficientemente buena, y ahora entiendo eso. Y ahora entiendo que no importa [quién] esté alrededor. Yo soy yo. Yo voy a llevarme a mí a donde vaya. O sea, que lo bueno o malo que vaya a hacer lo voy a hacer donde sea. [pausa] Y estoy feliz.

Because this is what is mine. So, she [the principal who did not hire me] is not going to tell me that I don't know how to do my job or that I'm not good enough. No. I am good enough, and now I understand that. And now I understand that it doesn't matter [who] is around you. I am who I am. I am going to take myself wherever I go. That means that the good or the bad that I am going to do, I will do it where ever it would be. [pause] And I am happy.

Marlene, a bilingual Spanish/English adult who experienced immigration as a child and had to learn English from her first day of school in Texas, has persisted against a message of “not knowing” rooted in a deficit-thinking

ideology of equating a speaker of a language other than English as a problem. Marlene's reflection of her teacher trajectory portrays her own schooling experiences as a road littered with diminishing messages toward the Latino/a identity. This "not knowing" must be reframed by educators and by educational practices and policies into what the linguistically diverse child does know—historical, cultural, geographical, and linguistic connections with places around the world, including the United States.

In the authors' work as teacher educators and researchers who work with adults who have been raised speaking languages other than English and have decided to become teachers, Marlene's stories resonate repeatedly. The notion of having to prove oneself, to be better than not only negative Latino stereotypes but also monolingual English-speaking peers, is at the heart of many of the stories that are continually told and retold by the students and teachers whom the authors encounter. In addition, the practice of measuring successful teaching of the linguistically diverse student solely or primarily through English language test scores, instead of allowing knowledge to be evaluated in the child's own language, offers insight into the demeaning interactions with teachers and schools recounted by many ELLs, like those Marlene had to endure. This, coupled with a lack of preparation on how to work effectively with ELLs and misinformation regarding second-language acquisition, places linguistically diverse students in a constantly vulnerable situation in which they are often blamed for systemic social and educational problems. The authors recommend following the "literacy engagement framework" of Cummins and Early (2015), in which teachers (and other practitioners) scaffold students' understanding of content by connecting with students' background knowledge and extending everyday social language to academic language across the curriculum. These attempts will be successful only if made by affirming students' identities in multiple engaging modalities, such as literacy productions and the creation of spaces for critical reflection, with permission given to contest dominant practices of hegemonic ideas related to language and culture in education.

Marlene's stories offer an understanding of the broader sociopolitical trends that Spanish-speaking students face as they transition from public education into careers, especially those requiring postsecondary education, and that may be more likely to be defined by dominant linguistic and cultural norms. While her experiences provide insight into the potential for improving the recruitment, preparation, and retention of Spanish bilingual teachers, perhaps more importantly, they emphasize that for these issues to be truly addressed, we must begin with rethinking public education to promote additive and responsive approaches that recognize and incorporate

linguistic and cultural diversity as resources rather than as deficits. It is through critical thought and reflection and the admission that the current reality is not ideal that one can imagine and pursue new narratives of possibilities (Greene, 1995).

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